



Press Release

AER responds to Regional Policy Commissioner's Orientation Paper

"Step in the right direction" needs to go further, says AER president Michèle Sabban

Strasbourg, 4 December 2009

"High-level debates on the future of cohesion policy are very welcome, since they ensure that the policy is more than purely a financial issue for member states. But high-level meetings are not enough. How can the EU and member states enter a strategic policy reflection without fully involving, from the very first stages of the process, the actors most affected by that policy: Europe's sub-national territories?" This was the initial response of the Assembly of European Regions' (AER) president, **Michèle Sabban**, to the orientation paper presented yesterday in Brussels by **Paweł Samecki**, European Commissioner for Regional Policy, to the High Level Group Reflecting on the Future of Cohesion Policy.

Nevertheless, Ms Sabban praised the commissioner's opinion paper as a *"step in the right direction, especially in view of the commission's absurd flirtations with 're-nationalising' cohesion policy at the expense of territorial cohesion objectives."* (Read AER's response to the commission's "non-paper" on the future EU budget [here](#).)

Ms Sabban added: *"We feel, however, that Mr. Samecki's opinion does not go far enough in supporting a system of truly multi-level governance, whereby the regional level is seen as a real partner rather than an afterthought."*

While agreeing with Commissioner Samecki's three priorities for cohesion policy – knowledge base for growth; green economy; employment and social cohesion – AER has called for a broader definition of the "competitiveness" objective. A territory cannot be competitive, for example, without quality public services and local support for SMEs, which are Europe's main drivers of growth.

Strong regional institutions are a key precondition for future economic growth, as [AER's study "From Subsidiarity to Success"](#) clearly shows by proving that stronger regions perform better economically than regions of highly centralised countries. Capacity building should not be limited to the commission and member states alone.

AER is pleased that Mr. Samecki's orientation paper calls for better coordination between EU funding instruments. That coordination, however, should go even further. The Rural Development Fund, for example, should be shifted into the cohesion policy framework to avoid unnecessary complexity and administrative burdens. Indeed Mr. Samecki's paper pays little attention to the need to coordinate cohesion policy with all EU

policies that have a territorial impact, a position outlined in [AER's response](#) last February to the Commission's Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion.

Background:

In June 2007, AER launched a task force on EU cohesion policy to prepare a study on cohesion policy post-2013. Published in January 2008, the study included contributions from 60 regions in 22 countries of the wider Europe. A new and more detailed political position on future cohesion policy was adopted by AER's political bureau in June 2008, in Wroclaw, Dolnoslaskie (PL).

AER adopted its initial response to the EC Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion at its General Assembly in November 2008, in Tampere (FIN). On the basis of this political reaction AER launched a broader consultation on the specific questions raised in the green paper and submitted a contribution to the European Commission in February 2009. During 2009 the AER task force on the future of cohesion policy updated AER's recommendations taking into account current developments such as the economic crisis, macro regional concepts and the Barca report. These [recommendations were adopted](#) at AER's General Assembly in November 2009 in Belfort (F).

More information about AER's work on cohesion policy is available [here](#).

*The **Assembly of European Regions (AER)** is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together more than 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation.*

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